

BACKGROUND OF THE 2 + 2 MODEL OF BS DEGREE IN PAKISTAN

Iftikhar Ahmad

Former Vice Chancellor, Gomal and Abbottabad University

ahma5532@gmail.com

Abstract

This historical letter was written to the Chairman, Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan by the then Vice Chancellor of Abbottabad University of Science & technology (Iftikhar Ahmad) in July 2019. The purpose of this letter was a proposal regarding the integration of the government colleges of Pakistan with the public sector universities. In this proposal it was recommended that the only viable solution of the integration of the colleges with the universities in the semester system is the implementation of the 2 + 2 Model of BS (4-year) degree. In this model, a student would complete the first 2 year of BS degree in a college and the remaining 2 year in a university or BS college. Although the model has been implemented by the HEC as a viable solution, but colleges and universities are still facing many issues and need clarity of the 2 + 2 Model. The letter was published on July 22, 2019 in the Daily Technology Time, Pakistan.

The notification is appreciated in a sense that HEC accepted that previous notifications were wrong. If the previous were wrong then what is the chance that this one is correct? The growing agnostic approach of HEC officials, not respecting/honoring the opinion of experts, universities, colleges and even provincial HEDs on this matter is beyond understanding.

The present issue of terminating the annual BA/BSc and MA/MSc after December 2018 is one of those issues, where HEC is enjoying the misery of the stakeholders and playing with their nerves. The HED Baluchistan has

already notified against this decision of HEC, while Sindh, Punjab, AJK and GB have not shown interest in its implementation.

However, KP has partially accepted the decision but is still confused. If all the provinces, colleges, universities and HEDs are reluctant to implement the decision the HEC should have spent time to revisit their decision or convinced the stakeholders. Colleges are expecting admission just after one-month and hence everybody across the country in colleges and universities are confused with this notification of July 11, 2019.

According to this notification colleges are banned from admission in BA/BSc after December 31, 2018 and these degrees are terminated. The conflicting details of this confusing and vague notification are provided as below:

- i. The main theme of this notification is termination of conventional BA/BSc and MA/MSc degrees after December 2018 and 2020 respectively, without knowing or considering or discussing private students, making up more than 50% of the total students.
- ii. According to this notification colleges are required to replace the existing BA/BSc with an Associate Degree (AD). As per section 1(iv) of the letter "the overall goal of the AD is degree holders with broad-based knowledge and marketable skills. However, the degree program requirements are given in sections 1(v) and 1(iv) i.e., general education and marketable skills such as computer literacy, office management skills, farm management and agri-business skills, retail service skills, hospitality industry skills, technology related skills, accounting and business related skills, or others. Section viii provides some mechanism for the implementation of this marketable skills based Associate Degree. However, in section 1(vii) transition of the conventional BA/BSc programs in colleges to marketable Associate Degree is described. Section 1(vii) is contradictory to all other sections of the notification or at least confusing.

After analyzing this notification even an average IQ person would raise the following questions:

- a) There is no mention of private students, and the termination of BA/MA degrees as stated in the notification will terminate opportunities for marginalized communities, who can't afford colleges/universities.
- b) More than half of the regular students in Pakistan attend Government colleges. These students have high dreams and hence obtain 16-year regular education for good paid jobs within Pakistan and abroad, but because of their socioeconomic status or other reasons they prefer first college and later on university. Is it possible that all Degree College students will go for a two-year technical skill based degree with low paid job?
- c) Do the existing government colleges have the resources and faculty members to run skill based degree programs mentioned in the notification?
- d) Even if a college has the resources and faculty, the programs have to be approved by the statutory Bodies of the universities, which is a time consuming job. Do the colleges have enough time to complete all these codal formalities before admissions in the next month?
- e) If technical education is such a great need of time then why are the best students not joining technical colleges and why the is student number decaying with time in polytechnic colleges in Pakistan?
- f) If this new scenario planned by HEC is implemented then what will be the difference between a technical college and a present days Degree College college?
- g) Is it logical to make every young chap of the nation a technician?

Before summarizing the details, it is necessary to be mentioned here that three types of students are generally attending higher education across the globe in developed as well as in the developing countries.

The first group of students makes more than 80 % with a focus on 16-year education, as most of the adequate jobs require this level of education. The second group of students is about 5% interested in jobs in academia or research and development and their focus is ultimately on a PhD degree.

The last group of students in higher education is about 15 %, coming from marginalized communities and can't afford colleges/universities for longer time and looking for a market based skills certificate or two year degree as mentioned in the HEC notification, as with such degrees they can get a low paid job of technicians etc. Before making any National Policy, HEC shall and must consider all these students and their goals. Furthermore, policy makers must be well aware of the existing resources of government colleges and also know the required codal formalities of universities for starting new programs.

This issue of phasing out of BA/MA degree is under consideration in HEC, and I approached the HEC management about the sensitivity of this issue earlier. The former Chairperson (Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad) and ED were kind enough to listen to my concerns and delayed the phasing out process in the best interest of the country and students. The HEC constituted Steering Committee and two meetings, on July 06 and July 18, 2018, were conducted on priority to resolve the issue once for all.

The following solutions were recommended by the Steering Committee:

1. The only viable solution of integrating government colleges with universities in the BS/BA (4-year) programs is 2+2 model following the US Higher Education system. According to this model the annual BA/BSc system would be immediately shifted to the semester system (with 2 year AD program) in the degree colleges in those programs offering BA/BSc degrees. After two year students will be transferred to postgraduate colleges or universities on merit basis to complete the final two-year of BS/BA (4-year) degree.
2. Semester system is different from the annual system, and hence they cannot be bridged. Therefore, discussing the concept of bridging is a waste of time and resources.
3. The date of the stopping of BA/BSc and MA/MSc should be extended to 2024 and in the meanwhile the universities with the help of HEC

would develop/strengthen their distance learning capacities as an alternative to the existing private BA and MA programs.

4. The principal seat policy of HEC for granting affiliation is against the Acts of universities and hence it is creating complications. Therefore, it should be up to the university, whether it can grant affiliation or not as per its Act/Statute.

Unfortunately, these conclusions of the Steering Committee have never been followed by the HEC and now at this stage, HEC, HEDs, Universities, Colleges and college students are confused about the critical situation. The growing monopolistic approach of HEC under the present management (of Dr Banuri management) disheartened me in dealing with this issue for a quite long time. It is an issue of National interest and being on the responsible seat of Vice Chancellor and having the knowledge of the problem, it is my responsibility to clarify the situation and inform the concerned officials about the complications of the wrong policy.

After all my struggle and efforts, now I am a firm believer that HEC will follow its own wishes and desires but it is my final attempt to request HEC to revisit and make appropriate logical as well as workable decisions in this regard in the best interest of the Nation.

Once again it is humbly submitted that KP has worked on this problem for quite a long time. In this effort all stakeholders including students, faculty members, College Principals, Directorate of Colleges, HED, University Vice Chancellors and even the former Minister of Higher Education played an active role. Conferences and workshops of the stakeholders were organized and ultimately a workable solution with consensus was sorted out. All the stakeholders agreed that the only viable solution of the problem of the integration of government degree colleges with universities in the semester system is the 2 + 2 model.

After realizing the gravity of the situation, the following recommendations are submitted after considering all the efforts of the KP Government, KP Universities and KP Colleges in this regard:

- I. Notification No. 15-54/A&C/2019/HEC/691 of dated July 11, 2019 may kindly be withdrawn.
- II. The termination of the existing private BA/BSc and MA/MSc degree programs may kindly be withdrawn till alternative is not sorted out (probably in the form of distance learning).
- III. The existing colleges offering conventional BA/BSc programs may immediately be replaced by two-year programs in the same subjects in the semester system under the 2 + 2 model. The colleges will follow the first two-year studies of the BS four-year program approved by the Statutory Bodies of the concerned university. After two years the students will be transferred to postgraduate colleges or universities offering BS/BA (4-year) and will be admitted in the 5th semester on merit (it is similar to our present BA and MA system but in semester system. The bare minimum requirements of the transfer will be two year studies with CGPA not less than 2 out of 4, and passed 66 credit hours with at least 30 credit hours with C grade or better). After transferring the students will complete the remaining 2-year of BS (4- year) degree at a postgraduate college or university, and hence will be awarded BS (4-year) degree in the concerned subject. The colleges and universities will be required to terminate their existing conventional MA/MSc degree programs and allocate the same resources to the additional classes of the 5th semester transferred students from colleges.
- IV. Those students not able to continue BS (4-year) studies because of any reason may opt for Associate Degree (Arts or Science). The bare minimum requirements of the AD will be two year studies with CGPA not less than 2 out of 4 and passed 66 credit hours with at least 30 credit hours with C grade or better.

- V. Degree colleges along with the two-year transfer programs in arts and science subjects will also be encouraged to start skills based Associate Degrees as mentioned in the HEC notification. The overall goal of this skill based AD degree as per sections 1(iv), 1(v) and 1(vi) of the HEC notification No. 15-54/A&C/2019/HEC/691, dated July 11, 2019 will be “producing skilled based persons with broad-based knowledge and marketable skills such as computer literacy, office management skills, farm management and agri-business skills, retail service skills, hospitality industry skills, technology related skills, accounting and business related skills, or others ensuring that every holder of this degree will be able to easily find a job or start his own business”.